

Intro to Political Theory

Pols 3310-04 Fall 2022

Tuesday / Thursday 2:30-4:00, PGH 200

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Course Overview

How shall we live together? That is the fundamental political question. Aristotle points out that human beings are unique among living creatures in that we cannot live solitary lives by ourselves, yet we also have no fixed method of organization. It thus remains an open question under what terms we will organize our common life. Those who engage in political philosophy attempt to answer this simple yet knotty question. In doing so, they must determine what is permanent and what is malleable about human nature. They ask whether there is any conflict between the life of a good human being and the life of a good citizen. They weigh tradeoffs between liberty, justice, and stability—and confront disagreement over what those terms actually mean. They judge what sorts of institutions and qualities of character can best support a good political society. In this course, we enter into “the great conversation,” in which political thinkers for more than two millennia have debated these questions with each other.

Course Aims:

The primary aims of this class are those that go into determining your grade for the course. Most basically, you will gain an understanding of the questions and problems that confront political philosophy. You will also achieve some mastery over the specific ideas and arguments of some of the most important contributors to “the great conversation” of western political thought. You will hone your skills at reading carefully and evaluating arguments. Because this is also a writing course, you will also improve your abilities in constructing your own written arguments, demonstrating your analytical skills, and expressing your ideas clearly and persuasively.

But there is another kind of aim for this course, one that will not be directly reflected in your grade. The thinkers we read in this class wrote not merely for their own contemporaries but for all time. These texts are therefore addressed to you, personally. They make claims to truth about fundamental questions: What is human nature? What does the good life look like? Can you be a good person and a good citizen, or must you choose? What is the relationship between freedom and justice—and how much of either of these should we give up to secure peace and security? What sort of

claims do others have on us? What, in the end, is the purpose of political life? These questions matter to each of us, both as individuals and as members of a political community. Our own life choices will inevitably presuppose answers to many of these questions. It is my hope for this class that our encounters with the authors we read will help us to think more deeply about these questions and to be more reflective citizens.

Course Books:

The following books are required reading and are available for purchase through UH's textbook partner. You may of course purchase books from other sources, provided you use the same editions. It truly is important to get the same editions; it helps keep all of us on the same page (literally) as we discuss the readings and when it comes time to write papers. All other texts will be posted on the Blackboard site. Blackboard readings constitute a major portion of the course's readings; please make sure you have hard copies of the reading at hand for the day's class.

Plato's *Republic* (translated by Allan Bloom)
Machiavelli's *Prince* (translated by Harvey Mansfield)
Hobbes' *Leviathan* (Cambridge Revised Student Edition)
Mill's *On Liberty and Other Writings* (Cambridge University Press edition)

Course requirements:

Course grade will be determined as follows:

Two Papers: 50%
Final Exam: 20%
Reading Responses: 15%
In-class Participation: 15%

You will be required to write two papers (5-6 pages, double-spaced) on assigned topics. These are not research papers. The only texts you will need to write them will be what we read for this course. I will discuss the expectations and requirements for these papers at greater length in class. This class will also have a final exam. Finally, there is a participation component to your grade—which is composed both of in-class contributions as well as posts on the discussion forum on Blackboard. For the latter, you are required to post 8 reading responses over the course of the semester. This averages out to roughly one such response for every three class meetings, but you may distribute them however you like throughout the semester. These responses must be between 100 and 200 words long. In them, you should raise a question, pose an objection, or make an argument about some aspect of the next day's reading. You are encouraged also to respond to posts by your fellow students. In order to count, you need to post by midnight of the day before class is to meet—I will read them before class and may incorporate some of them into our discussion.

With all of your work, be sure to follow UH's standards of conduct regarding academic honesty and plagiarism. Violations of these standards will be referred to the appropriate dean.

Reading assignment due dates:

The Politics of the Good Life

August 23	Intro
Aug. 25	Plato's <i>Apology of Socrates</i> (on Blackboard) read all
Aug. 30	Plato's <i>Apology of Socrates</i> (on Blackboard) continued
September 1	Plato's <i>Republic</i> bk. 1
Sept. 6	Plato's <i>Republic</i> bks. 2-3 (selections announced in class)
Sept. 8	Plato's <i>Republic</i> bk. 4
Sept. 13	Plato's <i>Republic</i> bk. 5
Sept. 15	No Class
Sept. 20	Plato's <i>Republic</i> bk. 6
Sept. 22	Plato's <i>Republic</i> bk. 7
Sept. 27	Plato's <i>Republic</i> bk. 8
Sept. 29	Plato's <i>Republic</i> bk. 9 (all), bk 10 (607a-end)
October 4	Aristotle's <i>Ethics</i> bk. 1 (on Blackboard) First Paper Assigned
Oct. 6	Aristotle's <i>Politics</i> bk. 1 (on Blackboard)
Oct. 11	Aristotle's <i>Ethics</i> bk. 4 (selections), <i>Politics</i> bk. 3 (both on Blackboard)

The Problem of Power

- Oct. 13 Machiavelli's *Prince*: Dedicatory Letter, chs. 1-5
- Oct. 18 Machiavelli's *Prince* chs. 6-8, 14-16
- Oct. 20 Machiavelli's *Prince* chs. 17-27
- Oct. 25 Hobbes' *Leviathan*: introduction, chs. 1-6
- Oct 27. Hobbes' *Leviathan*: chs. 46, 10-11, 13
- November 1 Hobbes' *Leviathan* chs. 14-17
- Nov. 3 Hobbes' *Leviathan* chs. 18-20, 21, 30 **Second Paper Assigned**

The Nature of Freedom

- Nov.8 Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* pt. 1 (On Blackboard)
- Nov. 10 Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* pt. 2 (On Blackboard)
- Nov. 15 Mill's *On Liberty*: ch. 1, and first half of ch. 2
- Nov. 17 Mill's *On Liberty*: second half of chapter 2, ch. 3
- Nov. 22 Mill's *On Liberty*: selections from chapters 4 and 5 (announced in class)
- Nov. 24 THANKSGIVING BREAK
- Nov. 29 Nietzsche: selections from *The Gay Science*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *Beyond Good and Evil* (on Blackboard)
- December 1 Last Day/Nietzsche: selections from *Beyond Good and Evil* (on Blackboard)

Important Dates:

Paper 1 Due: October 23 (11:59 PM)

Paper 2 Due: November 20 (11:59 PM)

Final Exam (in class): Dec. 13 (2-5pm)

Other information/policies:

COVID-19 Information: Students are encouraged to visit the University's COVID-19 website for important information including diagnosis and symptom protocols, on-campus testing, and vaccine information. Please check the website throughout the semester for updates.

Vaccinations Data suggests that vaccination remains the best intervention for reliable protection against COVID-19. Students are asked to familiarize themselves with pertinent vaccine information and to consult with their health care provider. The University strongly encourages all students, faculty and staff to be vaccinated.

Reasonable Academic Adjustments/Auxiliary Aids: The University of Houston complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, pertaining to the provision of reasonable academic adjustments/auxiliary aids for disabled students. In accordance with Section 504 and ADA guidelines, UH strives to provide reasonable academic adjustments/auxiliary aids to students who request and require them. If you believe that you have a disability requiring an academic adjustments/auxiliary aid, please contact the Justin Dart Jr. Student Accessibility Center (formerly the Justin Dart, Jr. Center for Students with DisABILITIES).

Excused Absence Policy Regular class attendance, participation, and engagement in coursework are important contributors to student success. Absences may be excused as provided in the University of Houston Undergraduate Excused Absence Policy and Graduate Excused Absence Policy for reasons including: medical illness of student or close relative, death of a close family member, legal or government proceeding that a student is obligated to attend, recognized professional and educational activities where the student is presenting, and University-sponsored activity or athletic competition. Under these policies, students with excused absences will be provided with an opportunity to make up any quiz, exam or other work that contributes to the course grade or a satisfactory alternative. Please read the full policy for details regarding reasons for excused absences, the approval process, and extended absences. Additional policies address absences related to military service, religious holy days, pregnancy and related conditions, and disability.

Recording of Class Students may not record all or part of class, livestream all or part of class, or make/distribute screen captures, without advanced written consent of the instructor. If you have or think you may have a disability such that you need to record class-related activities, please contact the Justin Dart, Jr. Student Accessibility Center. If you have an accommodation to record class-related activities, those recordings may not be shared with any other student, whether in this course or not, or with any other person or on any other platform. Classes may be recorded by the instructor. Students may use instructor's recordings for their own studying and notetaking. Instructor's recordings are not authorized to be shared with anyone without the prior written approval of the instructor. Failure to comply with requirements regarding recordings will result in a disciplinary referral to the Dean of Students Office and may result in disciplinary action.

Syllabus Changes Due to the changing nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, please note that the instructor may need to make modifications to the course syllabus and may do so at any time. Notice of such changes will be announced as quickly as possible via email and Blackboard.